

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET
UPDATED—OCTOBER 4, 2013

Meeting Date: October 10, 2013

Agenda Item: Proposed Fishing Regulation Change for Seeley Lake--2014

Division: Fish and Wildlife (Fisheries) **Action Needed:** Approval of Proposed Rule

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background.

The fishing regulation process is based on a four-year cycle, where the first year of each cycle is dedicated to actively soliciting ideas for changes from the public. During the following three years of the cycle ("off-cycle" years), ideas are only solicited internally from FWP biologists, fish managers and enforcement personnel. Regulations are proposed to the commission during off-cycle years only if they meet certain criteria: achieve enforcement needs, provide clarification, are important for species conservation, are removing regulations no longer relevant, or fulfill direction provided in management plans. The fishing regulation proposals for 2014 are an off-cycle year; the next year with full public involvement will be 2016.

Public Involvement Process & Results.

If this tentative regulation is approved (or changed) by the commission on October 10, it will be posted on the FWP website along with a notice of a 30-day public comment period. Following public input, the proposal will be revised if necessary and the final proposed regulation will be submitted to for commission approval on December 12.

Alternatives and Analysis.

The proposed regulation change for Seeley Lake is in response to the recent discovery of smallmouth bass in Seeley Lake in late summer 2013, apparently the result of an illegal introduction. In the judgment of FWP, and a previous study on the potential for smallmouth in western Montana (Bennett and Bennett 1991), there is considerable potential for smallmouth to occupy portions of the Clearwater drainage in sufficient numbers to impact bull trout, cutthroat trout and other native species. Because of this, immediate action to encourage unlimited harvest of this species is warranted and is consistent with options provided in FWPs *Illegal and Unauthorized Introduction of Aquatic Wildlife Policy*. Largemouth bass have been in the system for many years. Prior attempts to enhance their numbers, including stocking and the restrictive regulations, are considered to have been unsuccessful. Grouping this species with smallmouth bass in this new regulation is consistent with the recent *Montana Statewide Fisheries Management Plan* (January, 2013) which has stated that future management for largemouth bass in Seeley Lake may include liberalized harvest opportunities.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale.

Changing management direction for largemouth bass in Seeley Lake combined with the need to respond to the presence of smallmouth bass to avoid impacts to bull trout, justifies the establishment of a no-limit regulation on both species of bass.

Proposed Motion

I move to adopt FWP's proposed regulation change for the 2014 fishing season.